

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-10NEW YORK TIMES
9 September 1983

STAT

Reagan Acts to Close Down Aeroflot's 2 Offices in U.S.

By FRANCIS X. CLINES

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 8 — President Reagan requested the Civil Aeronautics Board today to close the two American offices of Aeroflot, the Soviet airline, and suspend its right to sell tickets through American carriers.

The action, which the White House said was "in response to the brutal and unprovoked Soviet attack" on the Korean jetliner last week, will have only limited effect since Aeroflot's flights to this country were suspended last year and since other foreign carriers might still be free to sell Aeroflot tickets in the United States.

"It certainly costs them in prestige," said the President's spokesman, Larry Speakes, in announcing the measure as part of what he said would be a continuing series of sanctions. "It costs them in the form of foreign exchange," he added, although the White House had no estimate of how the carrier's business might be affected.

"It's hard to imagine a more minimal operation," an Administration official said privately in gauging the action's effect.

Criticism From Right Grows

The President's request would include the expulsion of three Aeroflot employees, the closing of offices here and in New York City, and a ban on the sale of Aeroflot tickets by American carriers as well as a prohibition on carrying passengers on trips that use more than one airline and that include Aeroflot destinations.

The President's action, which Administration officials expect the C.A.B. to put into effect Monday, was announced as Mr. Reagan came under increasing criticism from some of his longtime conservative supporters. These supporters contend he has not taken strong enough reaction to the incident in which 268 people, including 61 Americans, lost their lives.

Mr. Speakes denied that the moves against Aeroflot were in response to such criticism. "This is in no way a response," he said.

"I couldn't characterize it as meaningless," he added in response to a question at the White House. While other foreign carriers might still be free to book Americans for Aeroflot connections in other countries, he said

the Administration hoped to see other nations join in the sanction. Canada has already suspended Aeroflot flights.

Mr. Speakes emphasized that the measure had been under consideration and awaiting action while technical questions were resolved. Other measures will follow, he said, that are dependent on discussions with the allies. He repeated that no consideration was being given in the Administration for the alteration of arms control proposals or the recent wheat sale agreement with the Russians.

Missile Test Is Discounted

In commenting on the continuing controversy over the airliner, which Russian officials contend was on an American espionage mission over Soviet bases, Mr. Speakes alluded briefly to reports that Russian military technicians had been trying a missile test before the airliner was downed.

"I've seen those press reports, which I don't doubt," he responded. He declined to elaborate, saying further details might compromise "intelligence capabilities."

An Administration intelligence official, requesting anonymity, said later, however, that a Russian missile test could not have been a factor in the incident.

Reagan Will Be at Service

Mr. Speakes, when questioned about legal American intelligence flights in international waters near the Soviet bases, said, in reference to strategic arms limitation agreements, "We routinely have reconnaissance missions and one of their major roles is to monitor for potential violations of the SALT agreements." He declined to elaborate.

Some potential domestic political dimensions of the incident have become clearer in recent days with such conservative spokesman as Richard A. Vigerie, publisher of Conservative Digest, contending the President had "walked away from the town bully without drawing his gun."